

COUNTRY Vs CITY:

Richard Thomas Ball, NSW Minister for Railways

Neville Pollard



R T Ball died at Marrickville in Sydney on 30 October 1937. The following year a plaque was erected in his memory at the entrance to Corowa Hospital, illustrating the high esteem that the local community held of Ball. This image was taken in 2013.

LORRAINE WELLS PHOTO

‘Mr Ball was a fine man, a vigorous and efficient Minister, and a loyal servant to his constituents.’

Premier Stevens on hearing of R T Ball’s death¹

Richard Thomas Ball (1857–1937), twice NSW Minister for Railways between late 1916 and early 1925, is not well-known because railway historians tend to neglect the political perspective. Volumes such as John Gunn’s, *Along Parallel Lines*, do not mention him by name.² R T Ball MLA guided legislation through NSW Parliament to construct over 1000 miles of railway, mostly in country areas. He was responsible for completing bridges and other public works as Secretary (Minister) for Public Works. Ball was briefly Minister for Agriculture and for a longer period he headed the Lands portfolio.

Richard Ball was born on 23 August 1857 at Surry Hills, Sydney, to George Ball (farmer) and his wife Ann Hooper, who had arrived in the colony as bounty migrants from Devonshire, England. This was just two years after the opening of the Sydney–Parramatta railway. Richard’s practical bent led him after schooling to employment at Chapman & Company, engineers, the Atlas Foundry & Engineering Works and a blacksmith in Brisbane Street, Sydney.³ Later he went on to help found the Institution of Engineers Australia. This experience would assist him in his later portfolios.

R T Ball possessed entrepreneurial and leadership skills which enabled him to purchase Byrne & Son’s foundry in 1881, on the corner of Cowper & Mundy Streets in Goulburn.⁴ Four years later he established R T Ball & Company. By 1888 he was constructing railway wagons and vans using borrowed capital. He established The Rolling

Stock Works two years later on the Church of England site beyond Baxter’s factory in Goulburn. Here 150–200 people were employed.⁵

Around 1890 he gained a contract to supply signalling equipment to the NSW Railways.⁶ With the onset of the 1890s Depression, however, Ball went bankrupt in 1894 with debts of over £6000, but received his Certificate of Discharge 12 months later. His political interests flowered between 1887 and 1894 as an alderman on Goulburn Municipal Council, occupying the position of mayor between 1890 and 1891 (see box p5).

In 1895 Ball was elected to the Legislative Assembly of the NSW Parliament as member for Albury, but was defeated in 1898 and again in 1901.⁷ Undaunted, he moved to the newly created seat of Corowa which he held from 1904 to 1920 (when the seat was disbanded). Between 1920 and 1927 he represented the seat of Murray. With reformation of the Corowa Division, Ball moved back to Corowa in 1927, holding it to his death ten years later. Whilst MP he continued as a mechanical engineer re-establishing R T Ball & Company in Goulburn around 1911, which was later managed by his son.

Ball’s policies initially reflected those of George Reid (1845–1918) whose liberal views stood for free trade, tax and land reform. Ball, representing a country constituency in the wartime anti-Labour National government, unsuccessfully tried to establish a Country Party in 1914–1915. He was also a member of the influential Farmers and Settlers’ Association (FSA). In 1932 he left the United Australia Party (made up largely of ex-Nationals) to join the United Country Party. It was support of the country that directed

Appearance in Court to Answer Charge of Bribery

When Ball was 23 years of age he was charged with offering a £50 bribe to the Colonial Secretary, Sir Henry Parkes, to secure government employment preferably as a blacksmith. Ball stated that he had been advised to do this and had noted advertisements in the SMH 'offering bonuses for government positions'. The seriousness with which this charge was viewed is evident in bail being set at £200 with two sureties of £100 after his first court appearance on 18 May 1880.

At a court sitting on 11 August 1880 Ball pleaded guilty to the charge. Satisfied that he had acted in ignorance the Attorney-General did not ask for a judgement to be determined. It is understood that offering of bribes often occurred around this time.

his parliamentary energies towards railway construction, land reform and 'small' government.

Before we study Ball's contribution, I make three comments: first, this article primarily focuses on his role as Minister for Railways and is, therefore, not a complete history of his life and work. Second, policies implemented by him were usually a co-operative effort made in the argy-bargy of cabinet and parliament and may not have represented his personal views. Finally, note that Ball's portfolio, specifically separated railways from other public works, highlighting how politically and financially sensitive railway matters were at the time.

MINISTER FOR PUBLIC WORKS AND RAILWAYS

R T Ball served as Minister for Public Works and Railways from 15 November 1916 to 12 April 1920. The first issue we need to explore is whether there was any deliberate scuttling of the city electric railway project from Central into the CBD and out to Bondi Junction during this period.

Let's go back and see what Premier Holman said in his election speech at Gundagai in early February 1917 about completing railways approved by previous governments but not yet opened. This included the £7 million City Railway. The Act to construct the city railway had been approved back in 1915.⁸ Holman said: 'Owing to the whole of the steel of Australia being required for war services, we have not been able to get the rails to complete some of the sections.'

Holman meant that the government, if re-elected, would complete unfinished lines, including the City Railway. Work on this project came to a halt after a cabinet decision in June 1917, two months after the election that won Holman a landslide majority.⁹ Construction recommenced in November 1920 after the Labor Party won had government the previous April but nothing really happened until 1922.¹⁰

Why wasn't the City Railway built during the Holman, Ball era?

First, the structure of the government must be considered: When Premier Holman was expelled from the Australian Labor Party in November 1916, over the conscription issue; he formed a loose Progressive/Liberal/National Party coalition that also included renegade Laborites. Holman continued as Premier with Ball, Secretary for Public Works and Minister for Railways.

The Progressives were supported by the influential rural Farmers & Settlers Association (FSA) who strongly represented rural interests. The Progressive Platform stood for: 'assisting the primary producers to obtain the full product of their labour ... decentralisation; improved facilities for transport, including a bold policy of road construction;

developmental railways; extension of advances to settlers [and] water conservation and irrigation'.¹¹

The Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Grimm, emphasised the country's grip on the Holman government in 1920 when he said: 'the majority of the members of the Cabinet were country representatives, and the legislation all through was in favour of the man on the land. During the past two and a half years the expenditure in the country had been £5,280,000 more than in the city.'¹²

Country Reaction to Impending Construction of the North Shore Bridge

(a light hearted statement of the tension between country and city)

Though the farmer's backs are bending,
Fighting fire and flood and drought,
Where, they settled down, depending
On the railways coming out—
Yet they soon will be in clover,
And be happy to the hilt,
And their troubles all be over,
When—the North Shore Bridge is built.

Though thy're [sic] always agitating,
And they curse the powers that be,
On the distant wheat lands waiting
For the railways yet to be—
There'll be joy and peace abiding
In the backblocks all around,
When—the city man goes gliding
In his railway underground.
Anonymous



A close-up view of the plaque honouring R T Ball on the right-hand gate in the photo on page 4. LORRAINE WELLS PHOTO

A review of newspaper opinion during this period shows considerable tension between country and city interests. *The Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* summarised the position:

The Country Traders' Association objects to the Government constructing the North Shore bridge and city railway whilst the country needs better railway accommodation.¹³

And again: 'The view taken by a number of Ministers is that primary lines in the country should take precedence over any portion of the city railway, which some Ministers have no hesitation in saying should not have been started at all. The latter contend that the city railway is only a duplication of the existing tram system, and will merely divert traffic and not earn fresh revenue.'¹⁴

The country faction in parliament clearly had the ascendancy. In response to pressure from the FSA and local railway leagues, Ball and Holman, who both represented country electorates, opened 15 new rural lines totalling 696 miles, made up of:

Dunedoo-Binnaway	44 miles
Binnaway-Coonabarabran	30 miles
Wagga-Humula	52 miles
Cobar - CSA Mines	7 miles
Denman-Merriwa	35 miles
Wyalong-Lake Cargelligo	70 miles
Wauchope-Kempsey	30 miles
Kempsey-Macksville	59 miles
Troy Junc.-Merrygoen	59 miles
Condobolin-Trida	130 miles
Matakana -Mt Hope	10 miles
Caragabal - Forbes	39 miles
Menindee-Broken Hill	74 miles
Craboon - Coolah	24 miles
Henty-Rand	33 miles
Total	696 miles

Work also continued filling gaps in duplications, namely to Cootamundra (46 miles), to Wollongong (10 miles) and to Singleton (14 miles). Collins argues that constructing country lines was a case of 'political pork barrelling' not only to ensure continuing support from the powerful pastoral lobby but to maintain the flow of private capital from wealthy rural interests.¹⁵

The Railway Commissioners were critical of Ball's policies because country lines added to the traffic burden at Sydney terminal and they would: 'undoubtedly be blamed for lack of foresight and charged with incompetence through their being unable to meet the difficulties that will arise owing to conditions not of their creation'.¹⁶ The Commissioners repeatedly pressed the urgent need for a line that would carry 240 million passengers annually from the present terminus to the Central Business District.¹⁷ They also frequently mentioned in Public Works Department Reports into proposed country lines that they would never pay.

Secondly, there was a perceived lack of wartime funding with a danger of increasing unemployment. The English firm of Norton Griffiths (NG) had contracted to the previous Holman Labor government to provide £10 million over five years to construct an agreed list of railways and other public works.¹⁸ In return they would receive a 1½% brokerage fee, 5% interest and another 5% for acting as agent in supervisory work.

By November 1920 the following works were to be completed:

- three sections of the North Coast railway,
- Glenreagh-Dorrigo,
- Humula-Tumbarumba,
- Menindee-Broken Hill,
- Werris Creek-Binnaway and
- Forbes-Stockinbingal, the Homebush Saleyards and rail loop and City Railway.

The contract was signed in April 1915. By 1917 it was apparent that completion of works, as agreed, could not be achieved because the contractor had not raised the required £4 million by that date, and the government had not provided sufficient steel. Ball amended the agreement by divesting the company of project supervision and only paying the agreed 5% interest on money actually raised. This ultimately saved the government £3,870,000.

Ball's reviewer believed that cancelling this contract was 'one of his most laudable achievements'.¹⁹ However, Collins makes the point that there may have been more sinister reasons behind Ball's decision although nothing could be proved.

'Later events ... tend to suggest [that] final shelving of the work [was] due partly to interference from rural political interests' [who had opposed the City Railway Bill back in 1915].²⁰ There is also the proposition that funds might not have been so difficult to obtain than the official line stated, another means of perhaps stifling the City Railway. Holman stated in his Gundagai speech that:

I have had ... for the last two and a half years, the trying task of financing New South Wales under war conditions. I will content myself now by saying that at the end of each of the two years that have finished we have wound up with a surplus. In 1915 we had a surplus of £420,000; in 1916 we had a surplus of £140,000. This year we hope to have a surplus....²¹

Ball stated at a gathering at Coonabarabran that there was plenty of money available to keep the wheels of local industry going.²²

POLICIES INDIRECTLY AFFECTING THE RAILWAYS

First, Holman made reference to the attitude of unions that had caused a 10% drop in output in railway workshops. If efficiency did not improve the government would have to institute the contract system. Ball, who was not in favour of government run enterprises, preferring completion of public works by contract rather than day labour used by the previous Labor government. These contracts had contained a 10% preference clause.

Ball told a deputation from the Master Builders' Association in 1917 that his government firmly supported the tender system; where the Construction Department of the PWD would have to tender on the same terms as private enterprise. Ball's eye for savings also led to downsizing the Public Works administration in January 1917 after construction of lines passed to the Railway Commissioners.

The second, allied to the first, was a concern about the state of industrial unrest. In August 1917 a bitter strike commenced when the Commissioners introduced a card system to keep track of time that a particular job took to complete at the tramway workshops at Randwick and the carriage shops at Eveleigh. This was ostensibly to improve output from machinery and not employees.

A month long strike ensued, extending to all areas of the

railways and many other industries in NSW and interstate. By October 1917 about 97,500 were involved, around 77,350 were in NSW—14% of the state’s workforce, including about a third of trade unionists.²³ It was seen by Ball and others as ‘an organised revolt against constitutional government’, believing the strike to be linked to The International Workers of the World (IWW) uprisings overseas.²⁴

Others saw it as a manifestation of frustrations exacerbated by the pressures of war. Unionists were also concerned that Commissioner Fraser might be embracing the views of Fredrick Taylor, an American, who supported: ‘an ordered, individualised, sanitised, hierarchically differentiated, rational industrialised environment’.²⁵ This was probably more to the truth.²⁶ While Deputy Premier Fuller took firm control; Ball seems to have used his considerable mediation abilities to try to avert the strike and bring it to a swift conclusion.²⁷ What is significant is the role played by the FSA in supporting the government by providing ‘loyal’ workers to break the strike.²⁸ Fuller said the government would not have won through without their help.²⁹

Transcontinental Railways: the opening of the standard gauge transcontinental line across the Nullarbor in 1917 motivated Ball to have cabinet adopt a proposal to extend the Condobolin–Broken Hill line to the South Australian border on condition that the Federal government extended their line to link up with it. At that time, rails had been laid from Broken Hill to Menindee and of the 290 mile section from Menindee to Condobolin, with 186 miles of track and a bridge over the Darling, still to be completed.³⁰

Ball’s Federal counterpart, Watt, was impressed with the idea. The line from Kyogle might also be extended to Brisbane (probably through Beaudesert) to complete a ‘through’ line to Perth. Speaking on behalf of a deputation in 1920 requesting that a line from Hay to Deniliquin be constructed, Ball reiterated that back in 1918 he intended to have the line completed as it was part of a ‘strategic’ line, linking Melbourne with Brisbane which had been recommended by the Federal government.³¹ The line was never constructed. Ball’s support of transcontinental lines was motivated by defence needs as well as releasing three ships presently carrying coal to South Australia which could be redeployed to the rural export trade. Once again we see Ball’s preoccupation with rural interests.

During July 1919 Ball attended a conference with the Australian Meat Board with a view of facilitating movement of fat stock to the metropolitan area through a line from Bourke through the North West into Queensland. This was enthusiastically received by the Board and again shows Ball’s support of the farming community. Ball approached his Premier with a request that a conference on the matter might be convened between the two states.³² Hindsight tells us that little became of the proposal.

R T Ball’s Work as Minister for Public Works
Ball’s biographer, Hine, listed the following achievements as Minister for Public Works:

- **Hydro Electricity:** Special committee of experts formed. They recommended the Barren-Jack [sic] and Nymboida River schemes (be constructed with local council involvement).
- **River Murray Water Agreement:** including Hume Reservoir, storage at Lake Victoria, weirs, locks and irrigation schemes including the Murrumbidgee River.

- **Sydney Water Supply:** including completion of Cordeaux Dam; investigation of other catchments including Woronora, Avon and Warragamba. Improvement in water reticulation throughout the suburbs including upgrading of Potts Hill reservoir near Bankstown.
- **Newcastle Water Supply:** recommended the completion of Chichester Gravitation Scheme.
- **City and Country Sewerage Schemes:** north of the Sydney harbour, improvements completed in various Newcastle suburbs, Albury, Orange and Narrandera. Works were in progress in a number of other NSW towns.
- **Bridges:** Seventeen city and country bridges were being planned at the end of 1917 including Georges River (to accommodate trams), Lane Cove, Hawkesbury River (Windsor) and the Macquarie River at Wellington, opened in February 1920. Others were planned throughout NSW including crossing of the Lachlan River near Hillston.
- **Harbour and River Improvements:** including work at Coffs Harbour, Newcastle and Port Kembla.
- **Reform of State Industrial Undertakings:** including Lime Brick Works at Botany. These undertakings had been set up by previous Labor governments and were unprofitable and poorly managed. Ball was not in favour of these undertakings.
- **Walsh Island:** Ball was instrumental in negotiating an agreement with BHP to build ships at Walsh Island, Newcastle. Ships were in extremely short supply at the time, due to the War but were necessary to export wheat and other primary products to Britain. Intervention by the Federal Government nearly scuttled the project but Ball, Chair of the Board of Control, succeeded in entering into a contract with the Commonwealth to build six ships on their behalf.

Question: Does this list represent a reasonable spread of public works between city and country?

HOW BALL SAW HIS ACHIEVEMENTS

In an interview with an *SMH* reporter, Ball stated that his principal achievements during his first ministry had been:

- Cancellation of part of the Norton Griffiths agreement
- Construction of country lines.
- Securing agreement from colleagues to close down the City Railway until country railways were complete. (This succinctly states Ball’s policy on city railways).
- Ship building in Newcastle which employed 2000 people.
- Abolition of all preferences for work from government undertakings.³³

Minister for Public Works and Railways and State Undertakings

Ball’s first ministry concluded with the return of the Labor Government on 12 April 1920, under John Storey and later James Dooley.³⁴ Holman blamed his defeat on political instability and a coalition split. Remember he was originally a Labor man and when it suited him to retain power he quickly changed sides so we can probably take these words with a grain of salt. The Nationals, under Sir George Fuller, were re-elected in April 1922. Ball was given the portfolio of Agriculture but two months later took over his old job on the resignation of Sir Thomas Henley due to ill health.

Premier Fuller’s Election Policy

Fuller’s election policy for the 1922 elections again stressed



Richard Ball was an advocate for the introduction of rail motors to replace mixed trains on country lines. CPH 42ft rail motors first entered revenue service on the Henty–Rand in Ball’s electorate, and Culcairn–Holbrook lines in December 1923. CPH motors saw a long and successful service on a large number of country branch lines as well as main and suburban lines, throughout the state right up to their withdrawal in 1985. This image shows CPH 25 standing at Holbrook on 27 February 1972 on a tour train. PETER NEVE PHOTO

rural development through:

- Decentralisation, construction of cross country railways and new ports.
- Carruthers ‘million farms scheme’ seen as achievable (see below).
- Encouraging the right kind of settlers.
- Land available for all settlers through subdivision of large estates and selling off crown land.
- Make up losses on non-paying railways but at the same time lowering fares and freights.
- A ‘straight deal’ for returned soldiers.³⁵

We need to place these policies into the wider context of the time. Crowley comments:

The 1920s saw a new surge of interest in settling the lands of the interior. Spurred on by the need to find occupations for returned soldiers [estimated to be 8000 in 1920],³⁶ and by the conviction that the self-governing Anglo-Saxon dominions could best serve the interests of the Empire, as well as their own, by absorbing large number (sic) of immigrants from Britain, the Australian state governments made special efforts to acquire and open up land suitable for wheat growing, dairy farming and fruit growing. Large amounts of loan money were spent on assisting British ex-servicemen and other immigrants, as well as surveying and clearing the bush and building roads and railways into previously unsettled regions.³⁷

The *Empire Settlement Act* (which Ball helped to frame), passed by the Australian Parliament in 1922 established immigration schemes between the British and Australian Governments to assist migration to Australia.³⁸ Immigrants were assisted with fares, living allowances, training, employment and grants of rural land. The close ties between Britain and Australia are further summed up this way:

The role of Australia was seen in the traditional light [producing primary products] and the economy was to remain colonial [although of course Australia was seeking to develop secondary industries]. The growth of rural industries which would supplement the industrial might of the United Kingdom was the real task – all that was needed was men to populate, money to develop it and markets in which to sell the resultant increase of primary products.³⁹

While Ball was Minister for Lands his major policy was to promote closer settlement by acquiring large estates and subdividing crown lands.⁴⁰ His biographer, Hine, states that 2.5 million acres of Crown Lands, resulting in the establishment of 565 holdings, were thrown open for closer settlement around the Barmedman–Rankins Springs and Griffith–Hillston branches with a similar take up occurring in other parts of NSW and in other states. These were certainly times of great change. In researching transport history of the Hillston area in the 1920s a farmer told me that one afternoon he almost drove into a fence which had been placed across the ‘road.’ This had been a short cut; with subdivision the new farmer had fenced off his land making the locals henceforth use the longer gazetted road.

Railways: During this time 532 miles of country lines were opened namely:

Coffs Harbour–Glenreagh	28 miles
Canowindra–Eugowra	26 miles
Barmedman - Rankin (sic) Springs	72 miles
Westmead–Castle Hill	7 miles
Castle Hill–Rogan’s Hill	1 mile
Urunga–Raleigh	3 miles
Griffith–Hillston	67 miles

Coonabarabran–Gwabegar	59 miles
Tarana–Oberon	15 miles
Binnaway–Werris Creek	92 miles
Macksville–Urunga	17 miles
Gilmore–Kunama	22 miles
Glenreagh–Dorrigo	43 miles
Molong–Yeoval and Yeoval–Dubbo	80 miles
Total	532 miles

This list does not include country duplications and deviations. The following lines were under construction: The Rock–Pulletop (Westby), Roslyn–Taralga, Trida–Menindee, Booyong–Ballina, Richmond–Kurrajong and Sydenham–Botany (a goods line to serve the country). Acts to construct the following lines had been assented to: Wollongong–Port Kembla (in association with the new C & G Hoskins Limited Port Kembla steelworks), Ungarie–Naradhan, Wyalong towards Condobolin, Uranquinty towards Moon’s Siding and Camurra–Boggabilla. There were only two Acts authorising construction of metropolitan railways: the *Regents Park to Bankstown Railway Act 1923* and *Tempe to East Hills Railway Act 1924*. Work continued on quadruplication and electrification of the Illawarra line as far as National Park, which to this day has still not been fully realised.

Development of Rail Motors

This was an initiative that Ball took particular interest in. I am unsure whether this was really to provide a better service to the country or decrease the cost of rural passenger services—perhaps both! While visiting Bowral in 1920 Ball indicated that he was in favour of rail motors replacing mixed trains on branch lines.⁴¹ He had authorised their first trials on the Grafton–Lismore line which, he said, had been very successful.⁴²

Following mechanical problems with the new CPH 42 footers, they finally entered service on the Henty–Rand (in Ball’s electorate) and Culcairn–Holbrook lines in December 1923, lasting until November 1924.⁴³ Apparently the Rand community asked that the mixed train be reinstated so that farm produce could be moved more frequently by the mixed train.

CPH motors saw a long and successful service on a large number of country branch lines (and indeed main and suburban lines) throughout the state right up until the 1980s. Ball also was behind developing a larger 150hp motor (RM 38) and plans for the *Silver City Comet* to operate from Parkes to Broken Hill.⁴⁴

The Carruthers Scheme and Border Railways⁴⁵

Joseph Carruthers (MLC) chaired a select committee in 1919–1920 setting up the ‘Million Farms Campaign to settle, ‘a million farms with a million families’⁴⁶ This was an outworking of Federal Government settlement policy. In a statement of April 1922 the new policy was spelled out:

In accordance with the decision of the Government, to embark upon a campaign of extensive country development, it is understood that the Cabinet will adopt a scheme proposed by Sir Joseph Carruthers ... to open up the great area of land extending along the Murray to the South Australian border for closer settlement. This will entail construction of a number of border railways, certain irrigation plants, and the building of bridges, etc., and is one of the most ambitious projects of

country development ever conceived in the State ...providing the Commonwealth Government is prepared to advance the necessary funds, it is practically certain that the [NSW] Government will undertake it.⁴⁷

The scheme entailed opening up about ten million acres from the South Australian border to the Central Division boundary in NSW, north to 70 miles from the Murray. R T Ball, then Minister for Agriculture, addressing a banquet at the Empire Hotel Wagga Wagga, guaranteed his government’s total commitment to land settlement as a way of increasing population and stemming drift to the cities.

A number of bridges across the Murray and broad gauge Victorian lines were extended into southern NSW through legislation of October 1922 including, Robinvale to Lette (which never reached the terminus nor was handed over to the Victorian Railways), Kerang to Stony Crossing (little used), Barnes to Balranald via Moulamein and Yarrawonga to Oaklands (a later addition).

Ball was a strong proponent of the project probably because it would develop the Southern Riverina, enhance his own Murray electorate and enable farmers to sell their produce to the closer Melbourne market. The Border Railway scheme, from an agricultural perspective, was a failure because not enough was known about soils and climate of the Mallee region at the time causing bankruptcy among farmers. The scheme did promote the ideals of Federation through closer cooperation between Victoria and NSW. The most economic benefit from the project was probably the construction of road bridges across the Murray River.

City Railway Development and the North Shore (Harbour) Bridge

When the Fuller government assumed the Treasury benches the City Railway had recommenced with euphoria that an electric railway would soon be a reality. It was now too late for country interests to scuttle the project as works were now far too advanced. Anyway, the government itself was now convinced that the work ‘was absolutely essential to cope with the ever growing volume of city traffic’.⁴⁸

This article went on to say that Ball’s ‘hostility’ to the project had been because of the Norton Griffith agreement and shortage of finance where public works expenditure had been limited to £4 million per year. Detailed planning continued on for the North Shore (Harbour) Bridge. The construction bill had, however, previously been knocked back three times.

The original plan for a cantilever design was approved by the PWD Committee in 1913. A suspension bridge had been dismissed believing it would not be rigid enough to carry a railway (the Bay and Oakland bridges in the USA disproved that). J J C Bradfield, Chief Engineer for the Metropolitan Railway, assured Ball that arch bridges were now safe to construct using new high grade steels. Under considerable criticism Ball called tenders for both cantilever and arch designs.⁴⁹ Hindsight shows his preferred design won the day.

Ball introduced the *Sydney Harbour Bridge Bill* in September 1922 as non-party legislation with agreement two months later. Financial provisions stated two thirds, plus approaches, be borne by the Railway Commissioners (highlighting its importance as a railway artery) with the remainder from landowners in the city and selected northern municipalities.⁵⁰ Because of Ball’s ability to steer the

bill through parliament and in so doing placating both Labor and Progressives he was given the honour of turning the first sod on 28 July 1923. He also laid the foundation stone on 20 March 1925. He did not attend the opening as he believed Jack Lang, Labor Premier, had snubbed him by leaving him out of the official party.

OTHER ISSUES

The Royal Commission of 1924

An inquiry, with the powers of a Royal Commission, was established by Ball in May 1924 to investigate the working of railway and tramway services.⁵²

The catalyst was the impending completion of Chief Commissioner, James Fraser's contract and deputies Milne, Cann and Fox. Parliament had been critical of the size of the railway enterprise and the quality of its administration and this was an opportunity to make sure that the organisation was working efficiently. This was certainly not the first time there had been disquiet in parliament and the Commissioners; it seemed to be an ongoing saga.

Ball appointed Sir Sam Fay and Sir Vincent Raven, two British railway officials, to carry out the task.⁵³ Most of the recommendations were concerned with financial arrangements and structure of administration.

In the end Ball seemed incapable of recommending wholesale changes to the railways through an amendment bill, with the makeup of commissioners being the only significant issue dealt with.⁵⁴

James Fraser was reappointed Chief Commissioner and O



R T Ball completes laying the foundation stone for the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 25 March 1925. HOOD 02155U, STATE LIBRARY NSW

W Brain and A D J Forster Deputies. The matter of giving the Commissioners control over railway revenues, one of the financial recommendations, was a contentious issue as the government would lose control over railway spending.⁵⁵ To be fair to Ball, that recommendation was even considered by the *Sydney Morning Herald* to be far too idealistic to entertain.⁵⁶ Perhaps Ball's reluctance to embrace real change was due to the impending close of the parliamentary session with elections reasonably early the following year.⁵⁷

The Ball Years in Retrospect

The post war years brought a period of unbridled optimism throughout Australia that lasted most of the 1920s. The catchcry 'Men, Money, Markets' spruiked by Prime Minister Stanley Bruce, was taken up by all political persuasions across all states as the means of developing primary and secondary industries.

Australia was seen as: 'the greatest underdeveloped country in the world', the country with 'the most room' and with 'the greatest opportunities for settlement and development'.⁵⁸

Men: The consensus was that labour was needed to fill up the empty spaces as a population of six million was thought to 'run a terrible risk'.⁵⁹ Between 1921 and 1930, net population growth was 312,800.⁶⁰ The Empire Settlement Act of 1922 formalised migration between Britain and Australia with the former contributing to the cost of assisted passages and some finance for land settlement.⁶¹

Money: Overseas borrowing during the same period amounted to £380 million.⁶² It was not always used efficiently; the Hume Weir on the Upper Murray, for example, was well advanced before a decision was made on how to use the land to be irrigated.⁶³ The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that railway policy seemed concerned about sanctioning lines without any way of financing them.⁶⁴ The Booyong–Ballina line took something over five years to build from start to finish!

Markets: Britain was the dominant market for primary products, especially wheat and dairy produce. Australia wanted preference into the British market but the request was side stepped. In return Australia was expected to purchase manufactured products from the mother country.

But it all went pear shaped:

The heritage of these policies of development was an enormously increased public debt; a vastly enlarged and unprofitable government [an over capitalised] railway system; a tradition of public aid, protection and sustenance to primary producers [a form of socialism]; a substantial increase in primary production; and an even greater reliance on overseas markets.⁶⁵

Colin Forster, author of '*Australian Economic Development in the 20th Century*' comments:

In NSW, the main railway building state, each decade after 1900 saw a further erosion of economic criteria" [to evaluate new lines]. Only the Depression in 1930 stopped the over-allocation of funds to the illusory, rural dream. Ball and Holman could be seen as co-conspirators of a quasi-socialist programme to increase economic growth in rural areas above a sustainable level.⁶⁶

There were personal failures too; in 1929, the Commonwealth Report on Soldier Settlement listed: lack of capital, uneconomic sized blocks, unsuitability of many settlers to farming and a fall in the value of primary produce

as reasons why a high proportion of settlers were leaving their land.⁶⁷

In 1928 the Railway Commissioners were concerned that they had to redress government policy shortfalls through assistance to struggling farmers and infant industry:

It has been the practice in this state ... to allow substantial concessions by way of rebate from the ordinary rates, not only in connection with the transport of stock, fodder, grain, and other primary industries but also on local manufactures, including iron and steel, cement &., and, in association with such industries, to grant concession rates for the coal, coke, crude ores &., required by such industries. It may be that the railways have, to some extent, assumed what is properly a government function in endeavouring to assist and foster industries which are vital to the welfare of the people as a whole, and it is suggested that the government should gravely consider the propriety of allowing a transport service to continue to bear a burden which to that's service, taken by itself, represents dead loss, though an undoubted gain in wealth to the community.

During the year just closed, a sum of no less than £321,271 was paid back to graziers, farmers, millers and other manufacturers, by rebate.⁶⁸

Then there was the huge annual operating losses incurred on country branch lines. We take as examples selected pioneer branch lines opened, or extended, during Ball's second Ministry: These amounts would have helped pay for the City Railway project! The government did compensate the railways £800,000 annually from 1929 to cover losses on development lines but there were strings attached.⁶⁹

THREE COMMENTS

First, I stress again the dominant theme of this essay; the power of the rural lobby (not forgetting the parochial Railway Leagues) as a force in railway capitalisation. But I cannot look back in hindsight and be over critical; if I had lived in this time I would no doubt supported the same policies and held my head high that the good times had arrived.

I would have been told that farmers needed to be 15 miles from a railway siding to make wheat growing economic. More lines were needed as wheat growing moved further and fur-

Table 1: Branch line construction costs and losses

Development Lines	Cost of Construction	Loss: Year Ending 1927
Cowra - Canowindra - Eugowra	£367,968	£15,054
Barmedman - Rankin (sic) Springs	£393,877	£19,683
Westmead – Rogan's Hill	£156,142	£25,150
Temora - Hillston	£750,199	£25,286
Tarana – Oberon	£167,565	£10,487
Binnoway – Werris Creek	£736,294	£1,693
Gilmore – Kunama	£279,866	£16,596
Glenreagh – Dorriggo	£1,382,380	£80,682
The Rock – Pulletop (Westby)	£182,910	£9,861
Roslyn – Taralga	£173,447	£12,361
Richmond – Kurrajong	£148,192	£8,682
Total Cost/Loss	£4,738,840	£229,646

ther west. I would have been told that silos and bulk handling were vital to marketing good quality export wheat to help the mother country. If blame is to be apportioned it needs to be levelled at governments who, with rose coloured glasses, chose not to institute measures to curb ever excessive capitalisation and waste that led to inflation and bust in the following decade!

When Ball left the Public Works portfolio in 1925 he was feted as a Minister who left behind record spending that had never been equalled—£50 million for public works!⁷⁰ Ball must, therefore, take considerable responsibility for this state of affairs and perhaps the severity of the future depression in country New South Wales.

Second, there is little doubt that the City Railway project suffered as a result of the rural extravaganza where country railways had priority. Sadly

Bradfield's grandiose scheme for northern, eastern and western lines was not achieved until 1956 when the Circular Quay loop was finally opened.

Third, Ball failed to recognise the impending importance of road transport that became noticeable during his ministership:

'Mr. Ball, Minister for Works, said he was convinced that the time had arrived when the Government should make provision for the extension of motor services in the country districts'.⁷¹

This was written in 1922, but he still steered the Ungarie to Naradhan, Wyalong towards Condobolin, Uranquinty towards Moon's Siding, Camurra to Boggabilla, Canowindra to Gregra, Jerilderie towards Deniliquin and Rand to Bull Plains lines through parliament after that time (the last three, fortunately, were never built per-



Carnsdale, on the Corowa line, was opened on 3 October 1892. It was renamed Balldale on 20 May 1905 to acknowledge R T Ball had been elected to the division of Corowa. He was the local member until 1920 and then again from 1927 to 1937. This image was taken after the station closed on 4 May 1975 before the place was demolished. It's naming shows the respect Ball held in the local community. BEV WILSON PHOTO



Following the collapse of the Norton Griffiths scheme Ball secured loans from the Federal Government in 1919 to construct a number of 'repatriation lines' to assist settlement of returned servicemen and provide work for them in railway construction. The Barmedman to Rankins Springs line was one of these 'repatriation lines'. The siding at Erigolia between Weethalle and Rankins Springs would have been very busy in earlier times with returned soldiers delivering their wheat or catching a mixed train to commence their journey to the city. By 1980 the place was clearly winding down with closure of the line altogether around 2000. NEVILLE POLLARD PHOTO

haps because it had finally dawned that the motor car age had indeed arrived).

A FINAL COMMENT

In researching this article I discovered a rare volume, 'A Parliamentary Veteran: The Honourable Richard Thomas Ball: Thirty Five Years of Public Service and Record Achievement.' Eug W Hine published by The Corowa Free Press 1937.

It paints a glowing, god-like, picture of Ball's life and work that is not justified. What is factual is that he was well-respected by his Corowa constituents as well as both sides of parliament, a country man through and through, hardworking; possessing considerable mediation skills exemplified in steering the Border Railways, changes to Norton Griffith and North Shore Bridge legislation through parliament.⁷²

He was an active member of the Baptist denomination and had a part in commencing Goulburn Baptist Church.⁷³ In personal relationships, he certainly appears to have lived out his Christian convictions. His 36 years in parliament stands testimony to his resilience and public service although it never led to a knighthood.⁷⁴ Except for one article in *The Land* newspaper where he was criticised for allegedly promoting Progressive MPs into city seats (previously discussed) he appears to have generally enjoyed a favourable press.

In defence of Ball's preoccupation with rural matters; his biographer seems to have been conscious that money needed to be spent equitably between country and city. Hine states:

There was complaint that too much money was being spent in the City, and too little outside it. As a country man himself, and the representative of an exigent country electorate, Mr Ball was all too painfully aware that a fight always had to be put up before money could be wrung from Governments for country works. This knowledge but deepened the sympathy he naturally felt towards country requirements. So that when the charge of unfair discrimination was formulated he was able to show that during his administration at all events, and under the regime of the national Government, country and city expenditure had been in the ratio of six to one.

I leave it up to readers to decide whether that ratio was 'fair and equitable'!

Acknowledgements

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End Notes

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5. Southern Tablelands History Matters: <http://strlhistorymatters.blogspot.com.au/2011/08/iron-lace-and-foundries.html>; accessed 5 March 2013.
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12. *SMH*, 23 February 1920, p7.
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14. *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, 24 June 1917, p2.
15. Ian Collins, *op cit*, p124.
16. Letter from Chief Commissioner for Railways 14 June 1917, State Archives (ref 10/4172).
17. *SMH*, 2 June 1917, p13.
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22. *SMH*, 30 April 1918, p6, 'Public Works: statement by Minister'.
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28. *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 10 August 1917, p19, 'Farmers Solidly Behind Government'.
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30. *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, 27 February 1918, p2; *SMH*, 26 February 1918, p6.
31. *SMH*, 15 July 1920, p7.
32. *SMH*, 25 July 1919, p6.
33. *SMH*, 14 April 1920, p11.
34. *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, 13 April 1920, p2.
35. *Singleton Argus*, 23 February 1922, p4; *SMH*, 21 February 1922 p8. There were other policies mentioned which were not relevant to this article.
36. Personal Communication Dr Stuart Sharp March 2013.
37. F K Crowley (ed), *Modern Australia in Documents 1901–1939*, Vol 1, Wren 1973, p 359.
38. *SMH*, 8 May 1922, p9.
39. *Ibid*, p231.
40. *SMH*, 20 October 1927 p9; *SMH*, 17 January 1928, p10.
41. *SMH*, 30 January 1920, p6.
42. *SMH*, 21 August 1922, p10.
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48. *SMH*, 17 April 1922, p6.
49. *SMH*, 19 October 1922, p10; 27 October 1922, p9.
50. *SMH*, 26 March 1925, p8.
51. Hine, ???, p43
52. For the complete Terms of Reference, see *SMH*, 4 October 1924, p17.
53. *SMH*, 24 April 1924, p9; *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, 2 May 1924, p4.
54. That was a contentious decision with the question that Hartigan might have been overlooked because of sectarian issues.
55. NSW Parliamentary Papers, 11 December



This water fountain was originally donated by Corowa Mayor A A Piggin in 1907 to commemorate the opening of Corowa's town water supply of which Ball obviously played a key role in its provision. The fountain was placed on the corner of Sanger and Mary Streets before being moved to where the War Memorial is now situated. It was then moved to the front of the old Council Chambers before being relocated to Ball Park in 1922.

LORRAINE WELLS PHOTO

- 1924.
56. *SMH*, 30 December 1924, p6.
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60. *Ibid.*, pp251–252.
61. *Ibid.*, p247.
62. *Ibid.*, p252.
63. *SMH*, 21 March 1928, p17.
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65. Personal Communication, Dr Stuart Sharp, May 2013.
66. Richard Cotter, *op cit*, p253 and p253.
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68. NSW Railways Annual Report 30 June 1929, p2.
69. *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, 18 January 1925, p1.
70. *SMH*, 26 October 1922, p8.
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72. *Baptist Recorder*, 2/92, April 1992, p8.
73. *SMH*, 15 September 1937, p16.

In this month's **Railway Digest**

P Class withdrawal

Beginning in October 1981, the VR's *New Deal for Country Passengers* revolutionised the provision of country passenger services in Victoria. One component of the project was the rebuilding of thirteen early-model 'flat-top' T Class locomotives into the 'new' P Class, incorporating head end power for the rebuilt former EMU Harris Cars that they would haul in push-pull mode – giving rise to the nickname 'Poor Man's XPT'. Now, these veterans are facing retirement, and in his own inimitable style, *RD* Signalling Editor (and V/Line driver) David Campbell pays tribute to these engaging machines.

SCT's Bromelton and Barnawartha terminals bring growth for rail

The opening in the last 12 months of new SCT Logistics intermodal terminals at Bromelton (49 kilometres south of Brisbane's Acacia Ridge rail terminal) and Barnawartha (near Wodonga in north east Victoria) has brought new business to rail on Australia's interstate network and demonstrated that rail can compete with road if the mix of reliability, distance and appropriate terminal facilities is right, as John Hoyle reports.

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